QANTAS SOCCEROOS v SAUDI ARABIA WEDNESDAY 29 FEBRUARY 2012 AAMI PARK

THE SOCCEROO

ISSUE: 23 $10.00

AUSTRALIA

EXCLUSIVE

NEW LOOK KIT

Our Qantas Socceroos launch their brand-new strip tonight

PLUS FAN FOCUS MEET THE QANTAS SOCCEROOS AND LINE-UPS

THE WIZARD OF OG

Sasa Ognenovski's rapid rise to AFC and Qantas Socceroos stardom

BRETT HOLMAN

This Qantas Socceroo can't stop smiling... and scoring goals

LUCAS NEILL

The Qantas Socceroos leader reflects on the challenges ahead

RISE OF THE ASIA-ROOS

Australian players are making a huge impression in the region - we chart this growing trend across the AFC.

LEGENDS: ALAN DAVIDSON

A star green and gold defender from the 1980s, 'Davo' was one of the best-ever produced in Oz. Find out why.

MY BEST ROOS: JOSIP SKOKO

The ex-Melbourne Heart star reveals the best 11 Qantas Socceroos he played with during his illustrious career.

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AUSTRALIA

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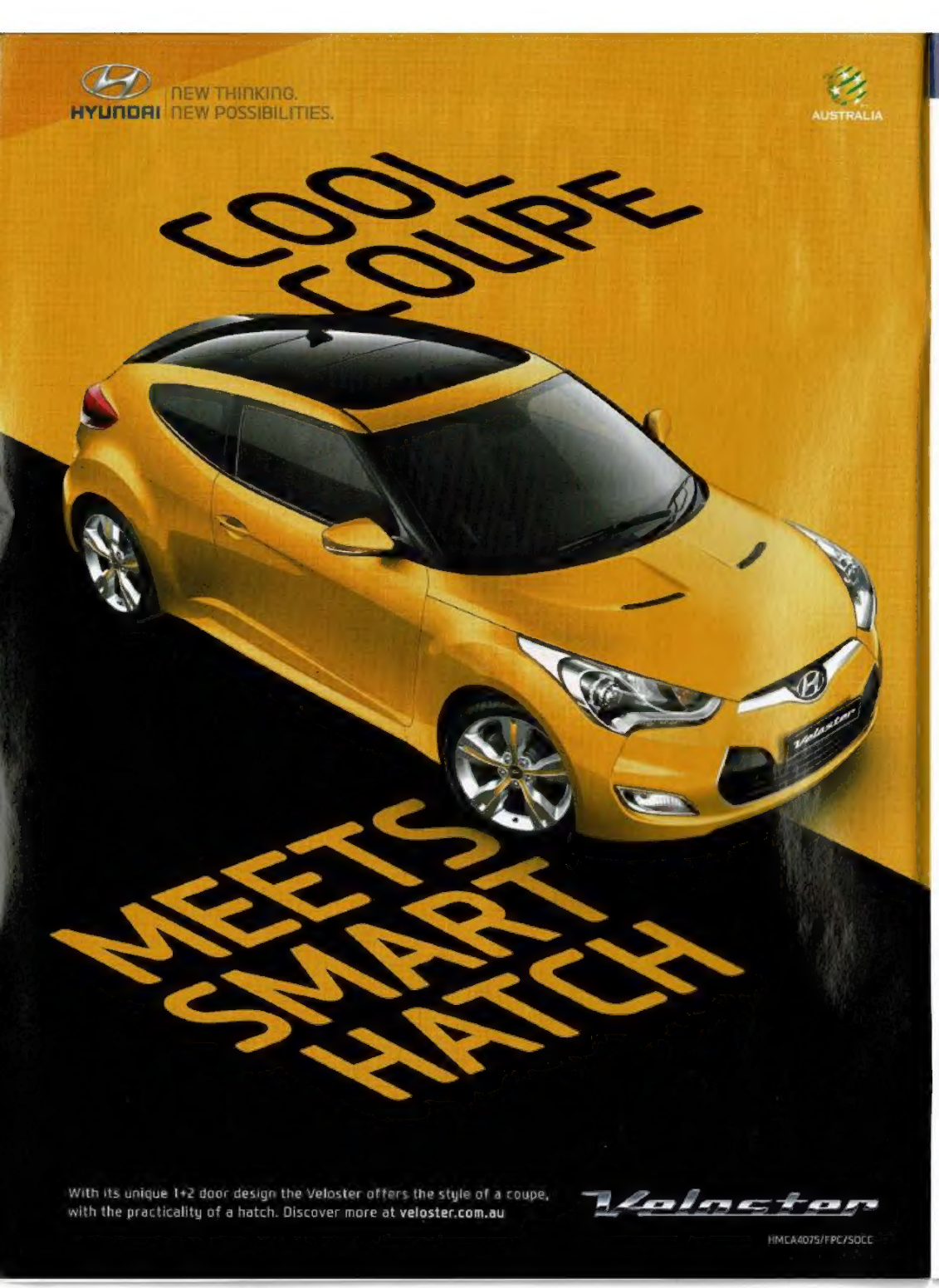
HYUNDAI NEW THINKING. NEW POSSIBILITIES.

AUSTRALIA

COOL COUPE MEETS SMART HATCH



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FRANK LOWY

A message from the Chairman of Football Federation Australia

Tonight at AAMI Park in Melbourne, we share a special bond with tens of millions of football fans across Asia. Hopes and dreams hang on the results of the ten 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers being played today and Australians, more than most, know about this rollercoaster of emotions.

While the Qantas Socceroos have already qualified for the next phase, our visitors from Saudi Arabia are among those nations striving to secure a spot, which means we will have an exciting 90 minutes ahead of us.

On behalf of the football community I congratulate Holger Osieck and the players on their achievements so far, but of course they know there is more work to be done to reach the finals in Brazil.

I extend the hand of friendship to our colleagues from the Saudi Arabian FA and trust they have enjoyed the hospitality here in Melbourne.

This match will be the first for Qantas Socceroos at this football-friendly venue, AAMI Park. In this regard, I acknowledge the support of the Victorian Premier, the Hon. Ted Baillieu, and his Government for making this event possible.

All our partners deserve praise for their on-going backing of football in Australia. We are building something grand with the aim of a third consecutive appearance at the FIFA World Cup Finals.

Australian football's strength is in our numbers. We have 1.7 million participants and we want each and every one to feel connected from the grassroots to the Qantas Socceroos.

This connection will be obvious tonight in your support for our national team. Having passionate fans means so much to the players, and we applaud you in playing your part tonight in our continued success.

This match will be the Qantas Socceroos' first at this football-friendly venue

Frank Lowy AC
CHAIRMAN
FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

TED BAILLIEU

Message from the Premier of Victoria

Welcome to Melbourne for this qualifying match between the Qantas Socceroos and Saudi Arabia. This is the Qantas Socceroos' first game at Melbourne's purpose-built AAMI Park, a fitting venue to capture the excitement of these two teams as they go head-to-head on the pathway to seeking a spot at the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil.

This match promises to be an action-packed game for players and fans of both sides. Saudi Arabia is looking to win, to keep its dream of Brazil alive, and it is also a great opportunity to congratulate the Qantas Socceroos on progressing to the next round of qualification.

This match is part of Victoria's exciting 2012 major events calendar, which includes major sporting events such as Melbourne Ironman, the Jayco Herald Sun Cycling Tour, the Spring Racing Carnival, Australian Masters Golf Tournament, the Australian Formula One Grand Prix and the recent Australian Open Tennis.

Football fans have much to look forward to, with additional international football matches to be held in Melbourne as the Qantas Socceroos continue on their journey to qualify for Brazil in 2014.

Melbourne will also host several matches as part of the AFC Asian Cup in 2015. International matches such as these help encourage people of all ages to engage with their local clubs and play on their local football fields.

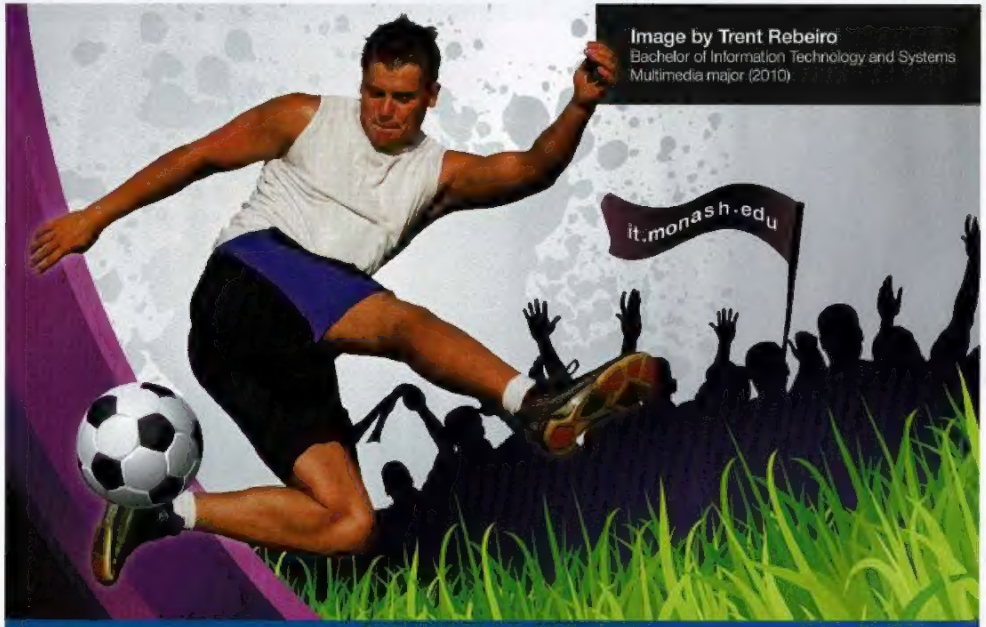
For our interstate and overseas guests, I encourage you to take the time to enjoy a taste of our famous sporting culture, entertainment districts and the vibrant atmosphere that Melbourne, our major events capital, has to offer.

I hope you enjoy what is sure to be an exciting match and I wish both teams the very best of luck.

International matches such as these help encourage people of all ages to engage with their local clubs

TED BAILLIEU MLA
PREMIER OF VICTORIA

State Government Victoria



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GROUP OF EIGHT

Australia ▪ Malaysia ▪ South Africa ▪ Italy ▪ India

HOLGER OSIECK

Tonight is another important test for the Qantas Socceroos

Dear football fans and supporters of the Qantas Socceroos, I would like to welcome all of you to tonight's game versus Saudi Arabia at AAMI Park.

I am really looking forward to the game in this beautiful football arena. On recent visits to Hyundai A-League games in Melbourne I could experience the fantastic atmosphere in this stadium. I am sure that your enthusiasm and support will give extra energy to our boys for a strong performance.

Tonight's game will be the final one of our first qualifying phase on the road to Brazil 2014. Although it has not been an easy task, the Qantas Socceroos have already managed to advance to the final round.

Our opponent, who sit in second position at present, definitely have to get a result to maintain their spot which also will get them into the next round.

The Saudi team always provides a lot of talent. Individual quality combined with skill, pace and finesse makes them a difficult side to play. Therefore I expect a strong challenge for our boys tonight.

Alongside our experienced players I also called in a number of Hyundai A-League players who performed well and consistently over the season so far.

It will be exciting to watch how these guys will mingle with our overseas players. Given all that, I am convinced that this evening will provide an entertaining encounter.

In closing I would like to thank you for your continuous support and I wish you all an enjoyable and memorable evening.

I'm sure your enthusiasm will give extra energy to our boys

Holger Osieck
HEAD COACH
QANTAS SOCCEROOS

FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

OGNENOVSKI'S MAIDEN GOAL A STUNNER

QANTAS SOCCEROOS THUMP UZBEKISTAN 6-0 AS SASA GETS ON SCORESHEET

What a result for the green and gold as they demoralised Uzbekistan in the semi-finals of the AFC Asian Cup 2011 in Doha. Adding icing to the cake was Ognenovski - in just his seventh game for Australia - popping up to snare his first goal for the Qantas Socceroos. Left back David Carney's free-kick was intended for the aerial danger of Tim Cahill but the ball fell for the Qantas Socceroos defender and one-time AFC Asian Player of the Year. Showing a real striker's instinct, Ognenovski was on hand to smash it home on in style as the green and gold took a two goal lead and a stranglehold on the contest. And didn't the big man enjoy it.

ROUND-UP

A round-up of the latest happenings in Aussie football

"Hey Archie, they said we can keep the kits!"

New kit unveiled

Who better to model the new Qantas Socceroos away kit than Archie Thompson and Mark Milligan, a couple of Melbourne Victory players selected in tonight's squad and who don't mind trying on the latest gear from Nike.

The new away kit celebrates "the vibrancy, youthful energy and modern approach of both the nation and football team".

As with many current FIFA World Cup kits, there is an environmental story to this new offering. The fabric of the kit's shorts made of 100 % recycled polyester, while the fabric of the shirts is made with at least 96 % recycled polyester.

But what did our two stars make of it?

"I like it," said Thompson.

"It usually takes a while before you get used to a kit, but this one jumps out at me straight away. This new kit would look good on me!

"I'm impressed with what Nike have done, not only with the ventilation down the side to improve performance, but by looking at the environment too."

Milligan echoed his teammate's views: "These kits seem to improve every time.

"They always seem to get lighter and cooler for the players, that's happened again. Nike are also pushing that it's made of recycling goods, which is excellent."

There is always a lot of interest when a new Qantas Socceroos kit is launched.

FourFourTwo Australia magazine sent out an innocent Tweet mentioning that they'd seen the kit a couple of weeks before tonight's game, and that they approved.

People messaged back begging for a sneak peak or even some hints on the design, but the magazine was sworn to secrecy.

Clearly the national team kit matters to the Australia public. And so it should.

So with a Victory legend joined by an on-loan star enjoying a brief foray back in the Hyundai A-League from J2 side JEF United Chiba, we asked the pair their thoughts on the Qantas Socceroos, playing in Australia and the booming Hyundai A-League.

Archie, how do you view international football at this stage of your career?

For me now [international football] is a bonus, considering my age. I always love being part of the Qantas Socceroos, it is so big now. It is one of the biggest national teams of any code in Australia.

The Qantas Socceroos play their home games in various locations, but considering the fan base here, should more games be played in Melbourne?

I think so, yeah. You only have to look at our local A-League supporters - we have always pulled in the biggest crowds. This is such a football city. You also have the facilities here with AAMI Park, which is the perfect size for matches and it has a great atmosphere.

Mark, in terms of your Qantas Socceroos career, you're back in the squad tonight, you must be pleased?

It is always in the back of your mind. Hopefully being in Melbourne and not playing too badly, has helped.

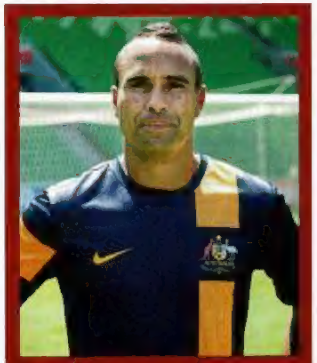
At the moment Australia is very lucky with the quality coming through. There are a lot of players who can do a job in the national team - both in the Hyundai A-League and the national team.

That is good for Australian football. I would love to play, but there are a lot of players who can do that centre-back role for the Qantas Socceroos.

Good to be back playing in Oz?

Yeah, it's nice. Firstly, away from the field - not that life is tough overseas - but life in Australia is excellent.

It has been great being with the players. I haven't been around for three years and I've noticed the difference in the standard. Not that it was poor before, but the step-up in quality has been noticeable. The Hyundai A-League has matured along with the players. The crowds have been excellent too - the league seems very healthy. ▸



Bottle for the battles ahead

It's a Qantas Socceroos kit designed with an eye on the environment, player comfort and Australia's unique landscape.

The fabric of the new Qantas Socceroos shirts and shorts are made with 96%-100% recycled polyester.

In fact, each kit is made using an average of 13 recycled plastic bottles.

Embedded with Nike Dri-FIT technology, the kits help to regulate players temperatures by removing sweat from the body to keep players dry, and cool faster than ever before.

Laser-cut ventilation on the new shirt promotes localised cooling where our boys need it most while new double-knit structure and yarns also makes this kit 20% stronger.

The fabric is also up to 23% lighter than the version four years ago.

The new away shirt (pictured) has an obsidian blue body with a yellow stripe along the entire left side, which runs through the national coat of arms reflecting the contrasting and bright light of the vast Australian landscapes.

MyFootballClub reaches 100k players

Australia's biggest online player registration system is now fully operational and has registered 100,000 players in its first month of operation for 2012.

MyFootballClub (www.myfootballclub.com.au) is the digital home of community football in Australia and is funded by FFA at no cost to associations, clubs and individual players.

In 2011, MyFootballClub provided an easy-to-use online registration for more than 230,000 participants across Australia's state, territory and regional football bodies.

In 2012, the roll out will cover another 200,000 players across NSW and Queensland. The online registration system already covers the majority of players in Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia, Northern Territory, Tasmania and the ACT.

"Our long-term target is to have one million participants on the MyFootballClub database by 2015 and provide a digital connection between all tiers of the game," said FFA CEO Ben Buckley.

"Football has a huge national participation base of players, coaches, officials, volunteers and club members and they are our strength, our energy and our future.

"MyFootballClub is the online portal to connect all these people to their clubs, their associations and ultimately to the Qantas Socceroos, Westfield Matildas and the Hyundai A-League."

Player registration is so easy with MyFootballClub.

U-22s are up for the cup

The Qantas Australian U-22s have been drawn in Group E alongside Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Macau and Timor Leste for the inaugural AFC U-22 Asian Cup 2013 qualifiers, to be played June 23-July 8 at a venue to be determined.

FFA Technical Director Han Berger welcomed the opportunity a new competition like this one presents Australian football.

"This tournament will be even more important as it will serve as the qualifiers for the 2016 Brazil Olympic Games. This is another great opportunity to get valuable experience in an international tournament."

AFC U-22 Asian Cup 2013 Qualifiers groups:

Group A: UAE, Iraq, Oman, India, Turkmenistan, Lebanon

Group B: Saudi Arabia, Syria, Pakistan, Palestine, Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka

Group C: Bahrain, IR Iran, Tajikistan, Qatar, Kuwait, Maldives

Group D: Uzbekistan, Jordan, Yemen, Bangladesh, Nepal

Group E: Australia, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Macau, Timor Leste

Group F: DPR Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong, China PR, Laos, Cambodia

Group G: Korea Republic, Vietnam, Malaysia, Myanmar, Chinese Taipei, The Philippines.

U-22 star Mustafa Amini

Australia and Japan are favourites to qualify from Asia for the 2014 FIFA World Cup

2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers: the next stage

Now that the Qantas Socceroos have qualified for the fourth round of 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers, the next stage kicks off in June.

The draw mechanics will look like this: Australia will be drawn out with the first ball from Pot 1, then placed into A1 and the second ball drawn into B1. However, Japan will take position A5 or B5 when drawn out to allow for them to participate at the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup.

Balls from Pot 5 will then be drawn with the first ball drawn from Pot 5 placed in the lowest position of Group A. The second ball drawn from Pot 5 will be placed in the lowest available position in Group B.

The same procedure will then be applied for Pot 4, Pot 3 and Pot 2 respectively.

Pot 1: Rank 1 & Rank 2 **Pot 2:** Rank 3 & Rank 4 **Pot 3:** Rank 5 & Rank 6
Pot 4: Rank 7 & Rank 8 **Pot 5:** Rank 9 & Rank 10

Matchday 1	June 3, 2012	3 v 2 & 5 v 4 (Australia = Bye)
Matchday 2	June 8, 2012	4 v Australia & 5 v 3
Matchday 3	June 12, 2012	Australia v 5 & 2 v 4
Matchday 4	Sept 11, 2012	5 v 2 & 3 v Australia
Matchday 5	Oct 6, 2012	4 v 3 & 2 v Australia
Matchday 6	Nov 14, 2012	2 v 3 & 4 v 5 (Australia = Bye)
Matchday 7	March 26, 2013	Australia v 4 & 3 v 5
Matchday 8	June 4, 2013	5 v Australia & 4 v 2
Matchday 9	June 11, 2013	2 v 5 & Australia v 3
Matchday 10	June 18, 2013	3 v 4 & Australia v 2

beyondblue Cup launches

Melbourne Victory and Sydney FC have joined forces with beyondblue to help raise awareness of depression and anxiety with the announcement they will play for the beyondblue Cup when they face each other for the 'Big Blue' at the Sydney Football Stadium on Saturday, March 10.

beyondblue aims to increase awareness of depression and anxiety, as well as related alcohol and drug issues, while reducing the associated stigma.

More than three-million Australians experience depression or anxiety, with men traditionally reluctant to ask for help.

beyondblue Chairman the Hon Mr Jeff Kennett AC expressed his excitement for this initiative and thinks it is a wonderful community gesture for Melbourne Victory and Sydney FC to partner with beyondblue for such a great cause.

To find out about depression and anxiety call the beyondblue info line on 1300 224 636 or go to www.beyondblue.org.au.

Berger hails new youth coaching structure

National Technical Director Han Berger is upbeat about the future of Australia's youngest national team after the appointment of Alistair Edwards as Qantas Joeys head coach.

Former Adelaide United coach Tony Vidmar will serve as an assistant, in addition to also being the new head coach in a restructured AIS (Australian Institute of Sport) program.

The two former Qantas Socceroos take up their respective posts following the departure of Jan Versleijen whose contract ended in December 2011.

Peter de Roo has also been appointed as the newly created Technical Manager of the AIS Football Program.

Edwards primary task will be to take the team to next year's FIFA U-17 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates.

The new appointments, combined with the AIS scholarship holders now living off-site, marks a new direction for the program.

"We have had the chance to rethink the structure of the AIS and Joeys program, which is a step up in quality," Berger said.

"We think it is better for boys that age to be in a home-stay situation. In regards the number of training hours and the quality of training nothing changes."

"We really want to make a step up with the AIS program. We want it to be one of the world's best programs which is why we restructured the situation at the top."

Berger believes the new structure is a "step up"

"We are No.1, say we are No.1!!"

Official: Oz top ranked in Asia

The Qantas Socceroos are the highest ranked AFC team in the latest table of FIFA World Rankings, officially making them the best team in Asia.

Though Holger Osieck's men dropped one spot to 22 on the rankings, they have become the top team in the continent, largely due to Japan plummeting 11 places.

The Blue Samurai now sit 30th on the official list, eight places below the Qantas Socceroos.

Australia were given even more space at the top of the Asian pile with South Korea falling to 34, while our next rivals Saudi Arabia fell two places to 89.

Strategic refereeing plan released

FFA's three-year 'Refereeing Strategic Plan' has been released with a number of key areas now being addressed.

"Essentially the basis of our plan is to recruit and develop more referees and assistant referees at every level," said Mark Shield, the FFA's director of referees. "We also aim to further enhance the consistent training programs and create opportunities at the highest level to get more experience.

"We are engaging as many stakeholders that we can to assist us in our quest to create a world-class refereeing program – everyone from each of the member federations, AFC, FIFA and the PFA – and the signs are encouraging."

Recently FFA announced a new committee to look at the structure of refereeing in this country. As a result a new strategic three-year plan has been created, aimed at addressing four key areas:

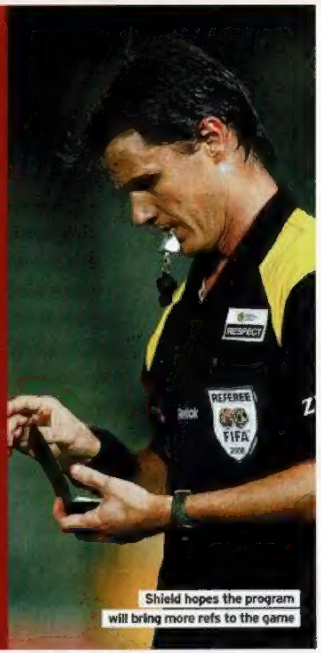
- Unifying a development and management system of referees in each of the states and territories across the country
- Nationally co-ordinating development and education programs, through a nationally implemented curriculum
- Creating a larger pool of talented officials to supply our elite competitions
- Creating further opportunities to enhance the experience of our international referees

To create the next batch of Hyundai A-League referees, coaches and instructors, FFA is creating a National Talent Pool of referees.

These next generation of referees, assessors and instructors will help supply the elite competitions (Hyundai A-league, Westfield W-League and AFC/ FIFA) for years to come.

FFA are looking in every league, branch and member federation across the country for talented officials who with the right training development can make it to the very top.

"It is a simple plan but one that we believe will succeed with a unified all-inclusive approach," added Shield."It is all about developing better referees in-line with the ever increasing professionalism and standard of football in Australia. The strategic plan is the first step in us achieving our goal."



Shield hopes the program will bring more refs to the game

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THE QUALIFICATION

THE STORY SO FAR

The Qantas Socceroos have qualified from third round 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers... but who will go through with them?

The Qantas Socceroos head into tonight's final match in Group D of FIFA 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers with qualification in the bag for the next round. However, a shock loss in Muscat to Oman and two testing matches against the eye-catching Thais proved once again that in the AFC, there are no easy games. The high points included a dominating 3-1 win in Saudi Arabia and an impressive 3-0 home win over the Omanis in Sydney. It's been a team effort over the last six months, but special mention must go to Victoria's own Josh Kennedy for his goalscoring helped by the brilliance of 'second striker' Brett Holman - the duo formed a deadly partnership in qualification.

AUSTRALIA'S GROUP D RESULTS AND FIXTURES

Date	Home	vs	Away
Sept 2, 2011	**Australia**	**2 - 1**	Thailand
Sept 2, 2011	Oman	0 - 0	Saudi Arabia
Sept 6, 2011	Thailand	3 - 0	Oman
Sept 6, 2011	Saudi Arabia	**1 - 3**	**Australia**
Oct 11, 2011	Thailand	0-0	Saudi Arabia
Oct 11, 2011	**Australia**	**3 - 0**	Oman
Nov 11, 2011	Saudi Arabia	3 - 0	Thailand
Nov 11, 2011	Oman	**1 - 0**	**Australia**
Nov 15, 2011	Thailand	**0-1**	**Australia**
Nov 15, 2011	Saudi Arabia	0 - 0	Oman
Feb 29, 2012	**Australia**	v	Saudi Arabia
Feb 29, 2012	Oman	v	Thailand

GROUP D TABLE

POS	TEAM	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
1	**Australia**	5	4	0	1	9	3	6	**12**
2	Saudi Arabia	5	1	3	1	4	3	1	**6**
3	Oman	5	1	2	2	1	6	-5	**5**
4	Thailand	5	1	1	3	4	6	-2	**4**

ALL THE TEAMS AND GROUPS FROM 2014 FIFA WORLD CUP ASIAN QUALIFIERS - THIRD ROUND

GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D	GROUP E
China PR	Korea Republic	Japan	Australia	IR Iran
Jordan	Kuwait	Uzbekistan	Thailand	Qatar
Iraq	UAE	Tajikistan	Saudi Arabia	Bahrain
Singapore	Lebanon	DPR Korea	Oman	Indonesia

RISE OF THE ASIA-ROOS

More and more Qantas Socceroos are forging club careers in the Asian Football Confederation

January's transfer window underlined an evolving trend across our football landscape. Three talented Australians – all with Qantas Socceroo experience on their resumes – inked major deals with big clubs in the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

Exciting striker Nathan Burns, who debuted for the green and gold in 2007, turned his gaze away from Europe after four years with AEK Athens to sign with the Korea Republic's K-League outfit Incheon United.

Joining Burns in this regional football powerbase was former Italian-based defender Adrian Madaschi, who wrapped up a successful short-term deal with Hyundai A-League club Melbourne Heart to link up with Jeju United.

And the Korean exodus was complete when forward Matt Simon departed the Hyundai A-League to join Chunnam Dragons after 36 goals over six years at Central Coast.

In the space of a couple of weeks three talented Australians showed why many are calling this era the rise of the 'Asia-Roos'. Although it actually might be more accurate to call it the era of the 'K-Roos'. ›

Lucas Neill plys his trade in West Asia with Al Jazira in the UAE Pro League

"I would definitely recommend the K-League to Australian players," says Matt Simon

The Korea Republic has become a hub of Oz activity in recent seasons. Talented ex-Roar defender Luke DeVere signed for Gyeongnam FC last season, joining Iain Fyfe at Busan I'Park and goal-scoring stopper Robbie Cornthwaite at Chunnam Dragons.

For Simon, when the opportunity came for him to join the K-League and play alongside fellow countryman Cornthwaite, he thought it would be a smart career move.

"The facilities here at Chunnam are excellent and there are some unbelievable players in the squad," he told *The Socceroo*. "I moved to Korea because the opportunity was too good to pass up. The training and the games are so fast over here and I believe my game will get better as a result. And with so much training and so many games I will be fitter than ever.

"I would definitely recommend the K-League to Australian players. It's a good league and the clubs' facilities are excellent. You really feel like a professional footballer over here."

While a new generation of our footballers strive to make their mark in Korea, there's one Aussie who's already secured superstar status there: Melbourne's own Sasa Ognenovski.

Qantas Socceroo Ognenovski impressed so much during Adelaide United's AFC Champions League run in 2008 that K-League heavyweights Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma signed the defender. His subsequent success blazed a trail for the green and gold rush north and, other than Josh Kennedy in Japan, Sasa's success has had the most impact in kick-starting the Asia-Roos trend.

The big man's accomplishments included the honour of becoming club captain and being voted the prestigious AFC Player of the Year in 2010. Throw in a goal, a winner's medal and a Man of the Match award in the AFC Champions League Final of the same year - as well as gaining his first Qantas Socceroo caps - and you could easily argue Ognenovski has been Australia's most successful Asian export.

Ognenovski's Korean link was forged years earlier when he was playing for Queensland Roar. Korean player Shin Tae-Yong enjoyed a stint with the Roar and later coached Ognenovski's club in the K-League.

"He knew me as a player and as a person," Ognenovski told *Australian FourFourTwo* magazine. "So that made the decision easier. It was important for me to find a coach that knew me and respected me, instead of a new manager who gives you only three or four games to impress.

"Also the club is based out of Seoul which is a great place to live and to train; the facilities are great. It's a great place for my family. Seoul as a city is buzzing. And the Koreans think I look like Hugh Jackman!"

Look beyond Korea and the Asia Roos trend is just as strong in neighbouring Japan and the J-League. Striker Josh Kennedy stands tall in every sense and is probably the most well-known Australian player in J1.

The Victorian's goals at Nagoya Grampus have shone a light on the green and gold's reputation and, like Ognenovski in the Korea Republic, he has become the 'face' of Australian players in Japan.

Fellow striker Alex Brosque is another Aussie finding his feet and the net in his first season in Japan with Shimizu S-Pulse last year. In fact, the J-Roos' accounted for five of the Qantas Socceroos' first eight goals scored in the current 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers, with Kennedy (four) and Brosque (one), emphasising the J-League's importance to Australia's attacking strength.

But it's not just goalscorers making a mark; our defenders have been making a name for themselves in the Land of the Rising Sun, too.

Geelong-born Matt Spiranovic has carved out a good career with the Saitama-based Urawa Red Diamonds since joining in 2010 from the German Bundesliga.

Mark Milligan at JEF United (currently on loan to Melbourne Victory) and Consadole Sapporo's Jade North have also made important contributions at their respective J1 and J2 clubs. In fact, in North's case, he became the first indigenous Australian player to have plied his trade in Japan.

Elsewhere and the booming Chinese Super League has both ambition and money. Former Newcastle Jet Joel Griffiths recently moved from Beijing to link with Shanghai Shenhua (where he partners Nicolas Anelka in attack).

While over in West Asia, Qantas Socceroo skipper Lucas Neill at Al Jazira and Al Nasr's Mark Bresciano are playing for clubs currently vying for the title in the UAE Pro League.

Interestingly also is a trend for our coaches to move into the region. While not at the same rate as our players, it's satisfying to see former Hyundai A-League coaches such as Lawrie McKinna at China's Chongqing Lifan.

Elsewhere ex Adelaide United assistant Phil Stubbins now coaches in Thailand while Steve Darby, Gary Phillips and Scott O'Donell are blazing a trail across Asia.

The move of FFA into Asia in 2006 has brought us closer to the region with Australia now tapping into a vast, fast-improving and ambitious part of the global football fabric.

For the national team, Asia Roos playing in FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers cuts down on long-distance travel for vital matches, while also making scouting of potential opponents far easier.

Qantas Socceroo Alex Brosque had a strong first season in Japan with Shimizu S-Pulse.

At club level, it has also enabled our players to show their wares in the region at such showpiece events as the AFC Champions League, giving them a taste of the big time in Tokyo, Beijing and Seoul.

The best example was Adelaide United's stunning run to the AFC Champions League Final in 2008. Current Qantas Australian U-23s coach Aurelio Vidmar's Reds caught the imagination of the sporting public across China, Uzbekistan and Japan, as well as back home in Australia.

Australia's Asian move has also allowed our players to access the AFC 3+1 visa rule, which allows for greater scope for AFC players to move within the region, notes Matt Simon.

"I think it's a great rule and it gives a better chance for more Australian players to gain moves into one of the AFC leagues.

"I think it will continue because Australians have come here and have done well and they really like the Australian mentality."

Nathan Burns: from AEK to Incheon United.

Little wonder our players are happy, playing for clubs with world-class facilities and under coaches with vast experience. "I'm under a great coach in Huh Jung-Moo who took the Korean national team to the World Cup and is highly respected here," says Nathan Burns from pre-season training in Guam.

Football these days is a global game with Australians popping up across the region. India's Premier League, Indonesia and Vietnam are just some of the exotic locations to also feature clubs with Australian footballers.

For a game like tonight's, it will be a fascinating mix when the Qantas Socceroos fly in from all points of the globe: Hyundai A-League players rub shoulders with a growing number of AFC and European-based names, comparing frequent flier miles and sharing jet-lag tips!

And that has to be a good thing. Our players are now influenced by different tactical styles and conditions - and with the rise of the Asia-Roos showing no sign of abating - it surely makes for a more adaptable and experienced squad on the road to Brazil 2014.

TSUBASA

CORNTHWAITE'S K-LEAGUE RISE

Former Hyundai A-League star Robbie Cornthwaite has reinvented himself as a K-League star at Chunnam Dragons.

The 26-year-old, now beginning his second season at the club, was regularly voted by local journalists as one of the best imports. Wisely, he was given a chance to slowly acclimatise to the Korean game's style, pace and nuances.

"The attraction for me to the K-League was to test myself in a very competitive league," Cornthwaite says. "Without doubt I'm playing the best football of my career.

"Just coming over here has really freshened up things for me. In fact it could've been ideal to make a move here earlier [in my career].

"I was looking for a new challenge out of my comfort zone," says Cornthwaite, who is coached by Jung Hae Seong, a devotee of the Barcelona method of training.

"The facilities are first class with all Korean players eating, living and training together day in day out. But the obvious factor is they have a much larger budget. I think in general, Asia is great for Aussie players to get paid good money and still have a chance of making the Socceroos," he says.

"Playing every week against Asian opposition is only good come World Cup and Asian Cup qualification. And with the AFC 3+1 rule, it has opened a window that may not have made these leagues accessible to Aussie players before."

The Korea Republic is starting to produce some fabulous young footballers. The tall defender has seen up close future talents such as Korean U-20 World Cup player Lee Jong-Ho, who is said to have been approached by Inter Milan when he was 17.

Jong-Ho and others have emerged off the back of serious money being invested in clubs, coaching, facilities and youth programs.

Korean players are now playing in all corners of the globe, too. In England, Sunderland fans are raving about their young striker Ji Dong-Won. The 20-year-old, who scored the winner for Sunderland in last month's memorable 1-0 win over Manchester City, is just one of a number of young AFC players who are showing why the development structures are on the right path.

Cornthwaite, capped for Australia in 2009, says the Korean football schedule is very much a European one, which he believes can help Australian players.

"The only way to improve is to train and play. This season in the K-League there are 44 league games, so along with a very difficult pre-season, it is only going to be a benefit to be playing that much.

"This Asia-Roos trend will continue as long as Aussie players continue to do well and show we are a strong football nation," he adds.

Cornthwaite believes it takes a certain type of person to make the move a success.

"You don't have a lot of free time; it's all about football but for anyone up for a challenge it's a great place to play football."

JADE'S J-LEAGUE CHALLENGE

Jade North's first season in Japan was eventful. A year ago, the 29 year-old Qantas Socceroo joined FC Tokyo as a back-up central defender and was subsequently part of the club's rise into J1.

Now with J1 side Consadole Sapporo, North can look back on a roller coaster 12 months of adjustment to a new country and style of football, as well as living through an horrific earthquake that rocked the country.

However it didn't take away from the experience."It was an enjoyable season," says the versatile former Newcastle Jets, Incheon United and Perth Glory player who last played in the Hyundai A-League with Wellington Phoenix.

"I didn't play that much but being FC Tokyo, the team that we are, we absolutely dominated the league. And you enjoy going to training because of the set up and the facilities. Now that I've seen how professional things are here in Japan, it's unbelievable."

North also proudly flies the flag for Indigenous Australia. His tribe's tattoos on his arm are always a talking point with fans.

"Many people come to training and they are always asking when I'm signing autographs what it is and what it means. Because not many people in Japan have tattoos, they are very curious about them.

"It is a little bit weird," he adds.

"I come from a small country town like Taree and end up in Tokyo."

MEET YOUR QANTAS SOCCEROOS

Meet the squad picked by Qantas Socceroos head coach Holger Osieck for tonight's clash

AUSTRALIA

Coach

Holger **Osieck**

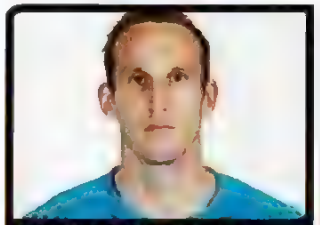
Position Head Coach

Osieck's measured approach and ability to regenerate the side has won him many admirers. The German-born coach enjoyed instant success taking Australia to the AFC Asian Cup 2011 final. The Qantas Socceroos have also qualified from third round 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers

QANTAS SOCCEROOS STAFF

Phil Wolanski Head of Delegation
Holger Osieck Head Coach
Han Berger Technical Director
Gary Moretti Team Manager
Aurelio Vidmar Coach
Robbie Hooker Coach / Recovery
Tony Franken Goalkeeping Coach
Ron Smith Analyst
Dr Mark Jones Doctor
Les Gelis Senior Physio
Kurt Lisle Physiotherapist
Luke Attwell Masseur
Dom Rabsch Equipment Manager
Adam Mark Media Manager
Mark Saliba Security
Joel Freeme Team Administration

Goalkeepers



Mark **Schwarzer**

Age 39 Position Goalkeeper
Club Fulham (England)
Appearances 94

The Qantas Socceroos' undisputed No. 1 is heading towards the magic 100 caps mark. After beginning his European career in Germany, Schwarzer is an EPL veteran after a decade at Boro and now Fulham. Despite being the elder statesman of the squad, Schwarzer is showing no signs of slowing down, recently saying, if we qualify, he'd like to play in the 2014 FIFA World Cup finals

Mat **Ryan**

Age 19 Position Goalkeeper
Club Central Coast Mariners (Australia)
Appearances 0

Ryan is a star in the making and could be part of the national team for many years to come. After earning a senior contract in 2010 with Central Coast he took full advantage with 31 games and 14 clean sheets. The shot-stopper was feted as NAB Young Footballer of the Year for the 2010/2011 season. And this season he's showed again he has the skills to go all the way

Defenders

Sasa **Ognenovski**

Age 32 **Position** Defender
Club Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma (Korea Republic)
Appearances 12

A star in the Hyundai A-League firstly in Brisbane, then with Adelaide United, the dominating defender's career has blossomed even more since his move to Asia, where he captained his side – and scored – in an AFC Champions League final. He topped a fantastic year off by winning the 2010 AFC Player of the Year, before debuting in the Qantas Socceroos to round out a fabulous rise in fortunes.

Michael **Marrone**

Age 25 **Position** Defender
Club Melbourne Heart (Australia)
Appearances 0

A marauding full back, Marrone has emerged as one of Melbourne Heart FC's most consistent performers. He has represented Australia at youth international level and was drafted to the Qantas Socceroos squad during the 2011 Asian Cup qualifying campaign. Now the former Adelaide player has a chance to show what he can do in a 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifier.

Matthew **Spiranovic**

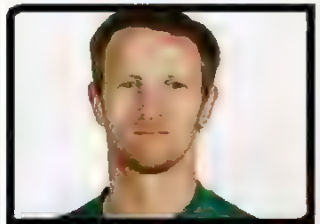
Age 23 **Position** Defender
Club Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)
Appearances 8

Geelong-born Spiranovic is your classic ball-playing central defender and is a star of the future. In 2006, Spiranovic joined FC Nuremberg before moving in 2010 to one of the biggest J-League clubs Urawa Red Diamonds. The defender's performances in the green and gold show he's ready to take the next step in his international career after untimely injuries in the past.

Mark **Milligan**

Age 26 **Position** Defender
Club JEF United Chiba (Japan)
Appearances 12

Milligan recently signed for Melbourne Victory as an injury replacement player and his short spell has been eye-catching. His positional sense, distribution and tackling show just why he has always been so highly rated. He was taken to the 2006 FIFA World Cup as a youngster but has only made 12 appearances for Australia since. Now he's in career-best form and primed to add to that number.



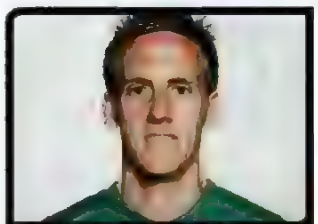
David **Carney**

Age 28 **Position** Defender
Club Bunyodkor (Uzbekistan)
Appearances 39

Now settled at a big club in the AFC, Carney has the opportunity to press his claims once again for the national team. The former Sydney FC, Blackpool and Sheffield United player, who learnt his trade at Everton, loves to attack down the left as a wingback/defender and has scored some stunning goals with his dangerous left peg over the years for the Qantas Socceroos.

© TM

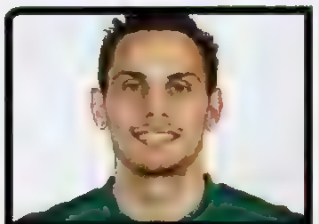
Defenders



Michael **Thwaite**

Age 28 **Position** Defender
Club Gold Coast United (Australia)
Appearances 6

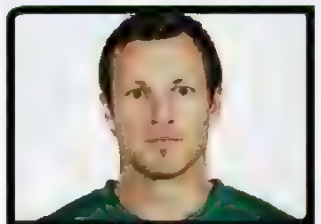
Thwaite has been one of the best players at Gold Coast United since the club formed and continues to lead by example. His powerful frame gives him a strong presence at the back but it belies a skilful, intelligent style as a player who likes to create from the back. Thwaite even scored his first senior goal recently when his club played Melbourne Victory in Tasmania.



Jade **North**

Age 30 **Position** Defender
Club Consadole Sapporo (Japan)
Appearances 34

After gaining promotion to J1 with FC Tokyo, North is now into his second season in Japan with J1 side Consadole Sapporo. North is versatile, having played for the Qantas Socceroos as a central defender and as a full back. He can even play in midfield. North has also won a Hyundai A-League Grand Final with Newcastle Jets and remains an important player in a big league.

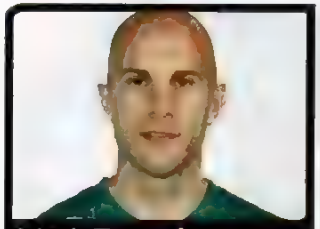


Lucas **Neill**

Age 33 **Position** Defender
Club Al Jazira (UAE)
Appearances 79

One of Australia's most recognisable sports stars, Neill plies his trade in the AFC with UAE club Al Jazira. He made his Qantas Socceroos debut in 1996 and he has established himself as our defensive linchpin and leader. His performances at the AFC Asian Cup 2011 and in 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers proof that he's still at the top of his game. An inspiration and a top-class defender.

Midfielders



Mark **Bresciano**

Age 32 **Position** Midfielder
Club Al Nasr Sports Club (UAE)
Appearances 57

Melbourne's "Bresh" is back in the Qantas Socceroos fold for the first time since 2010. His eye-catching form and impressive goal tally in the UAE Pro League alerted Holger Osieck to the former Italian based star's qualities. After over 50 appearances for Australia, Bresciano can look back on a stellar career in the green and gold. Now, revitalised in the UAE, he has a chance to continue

Erik **Paartalu**

Age 25 **Position** Midfielder
Club Brisbane Roar (Australia)
Appearances 0

Since joining in 2010, Paartalu has been a revelation in his defensive midfield role for Brisbane Roar. With four years' experience in Scottish football, Paartalu's towering height, strength and passing ability make him extremely hard to beat in a midfield battle. What's more, his goals and distribution have been key to the club's rise to the top in the Hyundai A-League

Bresciano on the ball at the 2010 FIFA World Cup

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AUSTRALIA V SAUDI ARABIA

Fill in numbers as line-ups are announced

AUSTRALIA

GOALKEEPERS

- [ ] Mark **Schwarzer**
- [ ] Mat **Ryan**

DEFENDERS

- [ ] Lucas **Neill**
- [ ] Matthew **Spiranovic**
- [ ] David **Carney**
- [ ] Michael **Marrone**
- [ ] Sasa **Ognenovski**
- [ ] Mark **Milligan**
- [ ] Jade **North**
- [ ] Michael **Thwaite**

MIDFIELDERS

- [ ] Mark **Bresciano**
- [ ] Brett **Emerton**
- [ ] Nick **Carle**
- [ ] Erik **Paartalu**
- [ ] James **Troisi**

FORWARDS

- [ ] Harry **Kewell**
- [ ] Archie **Thompson**
- [ ] Adam **Sarota**
- [ ] Alex **Brosque**

GOALSCORERS

SAUDI ARABIA

DEFENDERS

- [ ] Osama Hawsawi
- [ ] Kamel Al Mousa
- [ ] Abdullah Al Zori
- [ ] Kamal Al Mor
- [ ] Sayyaf Al Beeshi
- [ ] Mohammed Eid
- [ ] Yasser Al Shahrani
- [ ] Hassan Mouath

MIDFIELDERS

- [ ] Saud Kariri
- [ ] Ahmed Al Fraidi
- [ ] Moataz Al Musa
- [ ] Mohammed Al Shalhoub
- [ ] Abdullaziz Al Dosari
- [ ] Nawaf Al Abed
- [ ] Salem Al Dosari
- [ ] Taisir Al Jassim
- [ ] Yayhya Al Shehri
- [ ] Ahmed Otaif

FORWARDS

- [ ] Naif Hazazi
- [ ] Nasser Al Shamrani
- [ ] Yasser Al Qahtani
- [ ] Yousef Al Salem

GOALKEEPERS

- [ ] Hassan Al Otaibi
- [ ] Waleed Abdullah
- [ ] Yasser Al Mosailem
- [ ] Ahmad Al Kassar

GOALSCORERS

SAUDI ARABIA

Once a powerhouse of Asian football, the Green Falcons find themselves in a tense final day battle to qualify from the group

Even among the FIFA World Cup's most memorable moments and for Saudi Arabia, a display of trickery by 'the Arab Maradona' at the 1994 FIFA World Cup USA™ was one of the very best.

Boasting three AFC Asian Cup titles and a cupboard of regional honours, it was not as a football kingdom to be reckoned with that Fuad Saeed Al-Owairan's strike on 20 minutes, preceded by a mesmerising slalom run from deep inside his own half past a hapless Belgium defence – best solo goal in the history of the World Cup, no less – left the watching world agog.

Al-Owairan's moment of magic was the campaign's standout highlight for the Green Falcons, who had arrived in the United States with a squad boasting plenty of experience and quality, but which was also burdened by the weight of expectation.

Coach Jorge Solari's men had finished runners-up to Japan in the 1992 AFC Asian Cup and were widely tipped to be the strongest team in the Asian qualifying group for USA '94. Instead, they finished third behind Iran and South Korea, and were forced to endure the nerve-jangling ordeal of a two-legged play-off against Australia.

Saudi Arabia won the first leg 2-1 in Riyadh, but the Socceroos responded with a 3-0 victory in Melbourne to book their place in the finals.

Solari's men were then drawn in a group containing Belgium, Morocco and the Netherlands, and while they were expected to finish third, they were not given much chance of progressing to the knockout stage.

Belgium, Morocco and the Netherlands had all qualified for the 1990 FIFA World Cup Italy™ finals, and the Belgians had reached the quarter-finals of the European Championship in 1992.

Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, had failed to get out of the group stage in their two previous World Cup appearances, in 1984 and 1988.

Solari's men, however, were not overawed by the occasion, and they showed their mettle in their opening game against Belgium in Detroit.

Goals from Saeed Al-Owairan and Sami Al-Jaber gave the Green Falcons a 2-0 lead, but Belgium hit back with two goals in the last 10 minutes to earn a 2-2 draw.

Saudi Arabia then suffered a 3-1 defeat to Morocco in Dallas, but they bounced back in their final group game against the Netherlands in Washington DC, with Al-Jaber scoring twice in a 3-1 victory.

Solari's men had finished third in Group F behind Belgium and Morocco, and they had done enough to qualify for the knockout stage for the first time.

Their opponents in the last 16 were Sweden, who had finished second in Group A behind Bulgaria.

Saudi Arabia had the better of the first half in Boston, but Sweden took the lead in the 52nd minute through Kennet Andersson.

Saudi Arabia equalised through Fahad Al-Mehallel in the 72nd minute, but Sweden scored the winning goal in the 79th minute through Martin Dahlin.

Despite the defeat, Saudi Arabia's performance at USA '94 was widely regarded as a success, and they went on to win the AFC Asian Cup in 1996 and 2000.

They also qualified for the FIFA World Cup France 1998™ finals, where they reached the round of 16 before losing to Germany.

Saudi Arabia's most memorable World Cup moment came in the 1994 finals, when Fuad Saeed Al-Owairan scored a solo goal against Belgium that is widely regarded as one of the greatest goals in World Cup history.

Al-Owairan received the ball in his own half and dribbled past six Belgian players before scoring with a left-footed shot.

The goal was voted the best goal of the tournament by FIFA, and it remains one of the most iconic moments in World Cup history.

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Al-Owairan's goal was also voted the best goal of the 1990s by FIFA, and it remains one of the most memorable goals in World Cup history.

ranks among the Top 10 Goals of the Century in a 2002 FIFA poll.

Much as 2006 had for the Qantas Socceroos, the impressive FIFA World Cup debut by 'al-Sogour' (the Falcons) signalled a high water mark for Saudi football. It was a moment 16 years in the making – from the time the national team first entered the qualifiers in 1978 – and kick-started a run of four consecutive FIFA World Cup appearances.

Subsequent performances never hit the same heights as the team bowed out in each of the group stages while the low point came in 2002, where they earnt the nickname "the 8-0ers" following a drubbing at the hands of Germany. But their continued appearance on the world's highest stage fuelled a growing expectation that Saudi football belonged.

For a nation comprising almost 75 per cent desert, the Saudis are remarkably comfortable on the football turf. The 14-club Saudi Professional League (SPL) underpins the game's place at the heart of the desert kingdom's sporting landscape.

In a culture where the Bedouin sports of camel racing and falconry are still practised, it is the legendary names of footballers like Majed Abdullah – 'The Desert Pele' – that are mentioned with particular reverence.

In more recent times the skill of Mohammed Noor Al-Hawsawi – 'the Saudi Patrick Vieira' – and Yasser Al-Qahtani testify to the depth of talent available to the Desert Sons.

It's certainly not by luck that the Saudis have taken home four AFC Footballer of the Year awards, most recently by Qahtani in 2007. It's a feat only bettered by Japan with six.

And in Asia's premier club tournament – the AFC Champions League and its precursor the Asian Club Championship – Saudi clubs Al-Hilal and Al-Ittihad have, between them, shared four titles.

Yet despite an influx of foreign imports, including a stint by fringe Qantas Socceroo Jon McKain, few local players are encouraged to develop their skills abroad – a matter of some contention among fans. Still, with none of the current national squad plying their trade overseas it gives Saudis the opportunity to cheer on their heroes each week.

Besides reaching the finals of the AFC Asian Cup 2007 – when a 71st minute header by Iraq's Younes Mahmoud scuppered dreams of a record fourth continental title (an honour now held by Japan) – it has been slim pickings for the West Asians in recent years.

Failing to qualify for South Africa 2010 and then being bundled out in the group stage of the AFC Asian Cup 2011 were easily the biggest disappointments.

The latter defeat delivered the harshest blow for the three-time winners, who ignominiously exited the group stage without a point – or a coach for that matter.

The team made the Gulf Cup finals in 2009 and 2010 and, in last year's AFC Champion's League, twice-winners and the oldest surviving Saudi club, Al-Ittihad from the Red Sea port of Jeddah, reached the semi-finals.

For a nation fed on a steady diet of silverware, it's been a lean period for Saudi Arabia recently

A victory tonight would confirm the Saudis' path through the group alongside Australia.

Can this Dutch great help the Saudis take three points against Australia tonight?

But for a nation fed on a steady diet of silverware it's been a lean period. In a worrying sign of the malaise, the Saudis plummeted from a 2004 peak of 21 in the FIFA World Rankings to a record-low 98 last year, and were 87 at time of writing.

It is not all bad news, however. In Colombia there was cause for optimism when the nation's FIFA U-20 World Cup 2011 team defeated Croatia 2-0 and demolished Guatemala 6-0 to advance to the Round of 16, where they fell to eventual champs Brazil 3-0.

Round two of 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers also showed promise as the Green Falcons bulldozed Hong Kong 8-0 over two legs on their way to the next round.

It has been a hard slog since, scraping together one win, three draws and a loss in the current qualifying stage.

The AFC Asian Cup 2011 debacle was the signal for yet another change of coach. But after Brazilian Ricardo Gomes was appointed – then parted company within a week following the Cup disaster – the FA turned to the Dutch legend Frank Rijkaard. The ex Barcelona and Galatasaray tactician was appointed mid-year as the campaign for Brazil kicked into gear.

It was a familiar story. In the hands of the apparently trigger-happy Saudi FA the national coaching gig has changed hands a staggering 23 times since the days when Solari and his men embarked on their US adventure 18 years earlier.

Charged with the responsibility of taking the Green Falcons all the way to Brazil, Rijkaard signed a three-year deal but a slow start to the third round of qualification – including a lacklustre 3-1 loss to Australia at home – left the Dutchman with no illusions about the challenges ahead.

Encouragingly for Saudi fans Rijkaard told fifa.com that his FA had more in its sights than short-term goals and was keen to "lay the foundations" for the future of the game.

"I'm a little more familiar with Saudi football now and I can say that there's a lot of work that needs to be done, both on the field and in terms of the game's administration."

The Dutchman seems a sound choice having led his own country to the UEFA European Championship semi-finals in 2000, but results to date have been muted and the road ahead, should the Saudis make it that far, won't get any easier. ▸

Footy culture Saudi style

Saudi [illegible] Islam and home to the holy city of Mecca – has come up with creative solutions to potential conflicts between religious, cultural and sporting demands.

[illegible] mosques were removed from outside coffee shops in a popular area of the capital, Riyadh, where Saudi men enjoyed a game [illegible] the FIFA World Cup.

[illegible] powerful and the teams can be [illegible] from a specially fitted truck so that the female could observe Maradona, the game's greatest player, and still catch most of the game.

[illegible] and women in Saudi Arabia will soon be able to enjoy the game side by side in the flesh with the construction of a [illegible] section at a Jeddah stadium.

[illegible] Muslim country restricts [illegible] unrelated men and women mix in public. However, the Al Sharq newspaper reports that [illegible] families, including private rooms and balconies, should be completed at the stadium by 2014.

Women and girls from [illegible] kingdom are passionate football fans and showed their enthusiasm for the beautiful game by wearing World Cup-themed abayas (cloaks) during South Africa 2010. Showpiece events such as [illegible] Champions League matches are also [illegible]

Yasser Al-Qahtani (green shirt) is all class but injuries of late have restricted the superstar Saudi goal-machine.

For Australian fans though there's plenty of interest in seeing whether Rijkaard - the man once identified as a potential Qantas Socceroo coach and coach of Harry Kewell and Lucas Neill at Galatasaray - can weave some magic on the sidelines at AAMI Park as the Saudis face their moment of truth.

However, there is no doubting Saudi Arabia's football credentials. Until recently former national goalkeeper, Mohamed Al-Deayea, held the world record for the most international appearances by a male footballer.

In the rarefied circles of the FIFA Century Club - footballers with 100 caps or more - the Gulf nation ranks among the top 12 countries in the world.

And Saudi remains one of the most successful footballing nations in the AFC, but time, and a host of title-hungry usurpers, has closed the gap on the traditional heavyweights.

While a distinguished footballing pedigree suggests the Green Falcons have the mettle to reassert their dominance on the continent, the clock is ticking on Brazil 2014 and they know it. It's why the team arrived so early in Melbourne to prepare.

With only the top two of each group advancing to the final round of qualifiers - the Saudis are in a titanic struggle to ensure they are on the plane for their fifth FIFA World Cup appearance when the samba beats start.

Sitting in second behind already-qualified Australia, but with Oman and Thailand nipping at their heels, a berth in the next stage is very much up in the air.

The team will not want for motivation but if it's inspiration they're seeking they could do worse than reflect on the words of countryman Hamza Flaifih who scored in the 1993 epic 4-3 win over Iran at Doha's Al Khalifa Stadium, punching Saudi Arabia's ticket to their first FIFA World Cup and paving the way for Owairan's entry into football folklore.

After the match a jubilant Flaifih trumpeted: "The day should be a holiday in our history, we finally reached the World Cup finals. We put in a tremendous effort and we always kept faith that we would win."

If they pull this one out of the bag a national holiday might well be on the cards. o

ONES TO WATCH

YASSER AL-QAHTANI

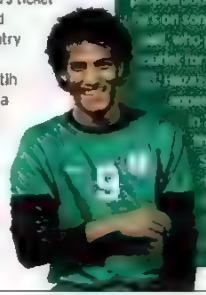
Globally known for his "will he, won't he" move to Manchester City in 2007 [illegible] Al-Qahtani became the most expensive footballer in Saudi football history when he transferred to Al-Hilal in 2005 for an estimated $3.7m. A former AFC Footballer of the Year (2007) and joint top scorer in last year's AFC Asian Cup where he captained his team to the [illegible] the 29-year-old is composed in front of goal and one of the most feared marksmen in Asia. [illegible] for good reason.

NASSER AL-SHAMRANI

Dubbed "Earthquake" by Al Shabab [illegible] the 28 year-old striker has plied his way to the top scorer gong in the Saudi Professional League for three seasons straight, netting three times in Saudi Arabia's 8-0 home and away demolition of Hong Kong in the second round of FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers. Shamrani [illegible]

NAIF HAZAZI

Early [illegible] Drogba" [illegible] Al Ittihad striker Hazazi can prove a tricky proposition for opposition defences when he's on song. He's a clinical header of the ball, who provides a pacy and direct outlet for the Green Falcons' attack. [illegible] Hazazi has scored seven goals in 21 appearances since making his debut in 2008. A [illegible] the following year against the Saudis were robbed of one of their most potent attacking assets during the FIFA World Cup [illegible] Asian qualifiers. Saudi [illegible] star of the future.



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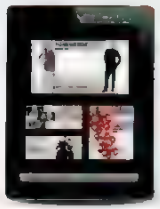

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SAUDI ARABIA 1 AUSTRALIA 3

DATE: SEPT 6, 2011 WHERE: PRINCE MOHAMED BIN FAHD STADIUM, DAMMAM WHAT: 2014 FIFA WORLD CUP ASIAN QUALIFIERS

Luke Wilkshire confirmed the three points with a penalty.

Kennedy ruled the roost for the Qantas Socceroos with his brace in Dammam.

This was the Qantas Socceroos' most impressive victory in qualifying so far, with gun striker Josh Kennedy's brace helping power the green and gold to a decisive 3-1 victory of over the Saudis in Dammam.

This was the second qualifier in the current phase coming just days after Australia had defeated Thailand 2-1 in Brisbane.

Taking into account the long journey and extreme heat (around 40 degrees), this was a hugely impressive all-round performance and showed why the Qantas Socceroos deserved their spot as favourites in their group.

Qantas Socceroos coach Holger Osieck's contribution was key, shuffling his starting XI from the Brisbane match to rest Tim Cahill, Matthew Spiranovic and Neil Kilkenny.

In came central defensive bulwark Sasa Ognenovski and livewire Michael Zullo at left-back, while Matt McKay moved into midfield alongside the consistent Mile Jedinak.

It proved a tactical masterstroke. While Kennedy took the plaudits for his double – as well as winning the penalty that was converted for the third goal late in the game – second striker Brett Holman was the perfect foil for the Nagoya Grampus star.

With Cahill on the bench for all but the final few minutes, the energetic Holman provided a vital link between the forwards and midfield. When playing off Kennedy, the Netherlands-based star confirmed just how important he has become for the green and gold.

Australia didn't have it all their way, though. There were scares early when Carl Valeri almost scored an own goal while Nawaf Al Abid and Ahmed Ateef both had good chances. Only heroics from sure-handed keeper Mark Schwarzer kept the score all square early on.

But in football you have to take your chances. The Saudis didn't and it was the in-form Kennedy who broke the game open with a header just before the break.

The big Victorian added a second with a cool finish on 56 minutes to put the Qantas Socceroos 2-0 up and in the driving seat.

Ten minutes later, however, the match tilted back in the Saudis' favour with substitute Nassir Al Shamrani converting a penalty as the home side reduced the deficit.

The Saudis sensed they might get something out of the game but Luke Wilkshire settled the tie for the visitors on 77 minutes with a coolly taken spot kick following a foul on Kennedy.

The win maintained the Australians' 100 per cent record in the group and showed long journeys, short-turnarounds and extreme heat were, like the Saudis on this night, beatable. ●

AUSTRALIA'S LINE-UP

Mark Schwarzer, Lucas Neill, Michael Zullo (Robbie Kruse 79), Sasa Ognenovski, Brett Emerton, Luke Wilkshire, Joshua Kennedy (Mark Milligan 89), Brett Holman (Timmy Cahill 87), Mile Jedinak, Carl Valeri, Matthew McKay

There are no easy games today... we are constantly being pressured

THE CAPTAIN'S ORDERS

Qantas Socceroos captain for the past five years, Lucas Neill has found that establishing himself in the Middle East has eased the burden of a gruelling Asian qualification process

[illegible] recovery point of view, I am feeling much fresher for both international and club games. Each time I see my team-mates come back from either club or international duty, some of them have been on two or three different [illegible] I did not have to do that. It gives me the [illegible] there is no fear of fatigue. It also helps when [illegible]

You've held the Qantas Socceroos [illegible] how have you seen the national team and [illegible]

I have seen the team go from strength-to-strength. Many of the players have stayed the [illegible] play. We have been challenged many times [illegible] There is such a high level of professionalism [illegible] has helped. At the start I wanted to set a [illegible] Socceroos when you come into camp, it is not about any individual.

[illegible] that as all of the guys are so accepting of that approach. All the egos go out of the window and it becomes about winning for Australia. I have become very proud of the person I have become – a wiser person who knows how to analyse situations. I've learned a lot in these last five years, including knowing when to say something and when to [illegible] via action. I have really enjoyed my time and hopefully I can get a few more years.

What is it like seeing these young players [illegible] does getting to Brazil 2014 drive these [illegible]

These players definitely have the potential. We just need to keep pushing ourselves in training and keep performing. We can only [illegible] as the team we are playing against, but if we keep going we will be in a good position. We still have two and a half years to become a better team – we are a work in progress. We have got all the right tools – experienced guys and young, hungry guys. We also have strength in depth now which we did not have in the past five to 15 years. Every position is either covered or being challenged for – that is a great problem for the manager to have. It is just finding the right chemistry.

[illegible] qualification now, how tough was the first stage on review? The likes of Oman and [illegible] many of us expected...

The gap is so small in the world of football, so I am not shocked by any team or an individual player who shows ability. There is so much support for football across the world, so there are no easy games today. We did not think Thailand would be as strong as they were – they turned out to probably be the strongest [illegible] we faced in this stage. That is a pleasant surprise though.

I like getting pushed and taking on challenges. There are no easy games, which is better for us as we are not playing expecting to win easily. We got pushed hard in Oman, [illegible] through our fault rather than them doing something right and we had to try and bounce back from that. That was something we had to learn from and we are learning all of the time.

We are constantly being pressured in all different areas of football – sometimes before the game, sometimes during it and sometimes after it when we have a two- or three-day turnaround before the next game. The games are only going to get harder from here. There are two and a half years until Brazil and we will have eight games in the next stage that will be even harder than the games we have played so far.

The challenges and the tests we will receive are going to be even tougher. If we do get to Brazil in 2014, there is no doubt we deserve to be there. ◦

"Whatever the critics have to say has never bothered me"

FEATURE: BRETT HOLMAN

BECOMING MR. POPULAR

After a stellar 2010 FIFA World Cup and a glut of goals since, Brett Holman might now be the Qantas Socceroos' most important player

[illegible]

I'm just happy I'm in some good form and playing some good football. I hope things keep going the way they have. What's changed? I don't think much has changed really. I'm still doing the same things and working just as hard at training.

[illegible]

Not really. My aim is to do well and to contribute to any side, whether it be my club side or the national side. Whatever the critics have to say has never bothered me. You just have to get on with it.

[illegible]

Sometimes in football it just comes down to where the football drops for you and there's a lot of luck involved. Like when Mark Bresciano took the free-kick against Ghana and the keeper parried it. He could have parried it to the other side and I wouldn't have scored.

[illegible]

It has to do with the form I'm in and the [illegible] level. Getting more opportunities in front of goal and scoring a lot more goals gives you more confidence.

[illegible]

Definitely. A lot of the roles I played under Pim (Verbeek) were off the bench and I had a bit less freedom than I do now under Holger Osieck. The role that I prefer playing is definitely central.

[illegible]

I've never really thought about it to be honest! It is up to the boss to decide who can play and who can't. At this point in time I'm playing and I'm happy to be playing.

[illegible]

He expresses a lot of confidence in me and has given me the faith to get out there and express myself. It pays off for a player when you receive confidence from the coach like that.

[illegible]

On paper you might expect Australia to qualify but you can't underestimate [illegible] in Asia. The conditions play a [illegible] these days too. If we get back to the way we played in the opening [illegible] then we're in good stead.

[illegible]

I don't know about that. There have [illegible] other matches where I've been in [illegible] had a good game. I probably could [illegible] a few more goals in the Oman game if I was a little calmer in front of goal.

[illegible]

[illegible] take their toll. I'd be [illegible]

[illegible]

It is always going [illegible] mind. When you play in [illegible] qualifiers there is only one goal – [illegible]. Thankfully we're through to the next phase [illegible]

BROSQUE'S DEBUT GOAL THAIS UP THREE POINTS

QANTAS SOCCEROOS STRIKER SMASHES VITAL WINNER AGAINST THAILAND

The Japan-based Qantas Socceroo striker could not have picked a better time to open his account with the national team. As Australia pressed for a winner in the opening group match of 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers, the Shimizu S-Pulse striker was a 79th minute substitute. Minutes later with the scores still locked at 1-1, a cross into the box found Josh Kennedy. The ball was chested down and it was Brosque who reacted first to lash home what turned out to be the winner. The one-time Hyundai A-League star wasn't in the original squad - he was called in for injured forward Scott McDonald - but he took his opportunity when it arose, much to the delight of his team-mates.

LEGENDS: ALAN DAVIDSON

LEGENDS

ALAN DAVIDSON

A world-class talent who was driven to succeed, 'Davo' will go down as a genuine green and gold great

Aidan Ormond

When legendary English manager Brian Clough says you're good enough for his team, you must be good. No, make that very, very good. Alan Davidson was just that.

A supremely focused individual who could play full-back or in midfield, he helped redefined the image of the Australian footballer in the early 1980s - an era when locally born players were beginning to make a significant mark in the national team.

Due to the era he graced, Davidson may not have reached the levels of fame as, say, a Kewell, Cahill or Neill. But make no mistake, there is a huge respect among the current Qantas Socceroos for this player.

Australia's workmanlike reputation was one to be proud of, but the lad from the west of Melbourne added a technical flourish that has continued to this day in the national team.

And Davidson's ascent underlined the trend of Australian-born talent coming through the national team. Australia's 1979 FIFA World Youth Cup team featured several teenagers born in this country, and a number went on to be part of the national team in the 1980s.

Geelong-born striker Eddie Krncevic was one of the first to make his mark, moving to Croatia, Belgium and France, and Davidson, David Mitchell and Robbie Slater quickly followed.

Davidson, a versatile talent combined two key elements. He was a ball-playing defender with vision, composure and technique, and he matched that with a tenacious, never-say-die attitude, work-rate and bravery.

The youngster was a joy to watch as he broke into senior club football aged 18-years-old, redefining the image of players from this part of the football globe.

Little wonder Davidson was on the green and gold radar from an early age and, in 1980 as a 20-year-old, he debuted for the national team against Czechoslovakia.

In the final of a three-game series in his hometown of Melbourne - and after two thumping wins for the tourists - Davidson helped the Australians to a 2-2 draw.

Coincidentally, 11 years later Davidson bade a farewell to the green and gold against the same opponent after 76 appearances for his country.

In the early 1980s and on the other side of the world, Clough had guided Nottingham Forest to a stunning run of English and European success with a team of hitherto unsung players reborn under his charge.

Simply put, Forest were unbeatable under Clough - one of the most respected football managers and characters of that era - with »

Protecting the football during a 1985 FIFA World Cup qualifier against Scotland at Melbourne's Olympic Park

DID YOU KNOW?

Davidson played against some of the big clubs of the world. In 1984 he was part of a national team that faced Manchester United, Juventus and Greece's Irak is. He also faced up to Scotland and England as well as Argentina and Brazil in his international career. At club level, he made over 330 appearances for sides in Australia, England and Malaysia.

a self-belief and will to win that took English football to a new level.

As such, Davidson's 1984 signing for Forest was a huge story here and a massive compliment for the then-24-year-old. It was even more special for Australian football given that "Davo" – as he was known – arrived at the City Ground direct from the semi-professional National Soccer League (NSL).

Though his stint at Forest was cut short by serious injury, restricting him to eight league and Cup appearances, it didn't dim his reputation. Far from it. "Most people will tell you that Alan Davidson was the best Socceroo we ever had," says Scott Ollerenshaw, a team-mate in the national team during the 1980s.

"Back in those days he could play anywhere. Right-back, central midfielder, he was comfortable in both positions. Davidson was definitely the best at that time. And the fans adored him, with one sign on the terraces – 'Davidson the Aussie Maradona' – summing up the devotion for their attacking full-back.

And while it's hard for anyone to compare to the talismanic Argentine, it was an example of this young Australian-born talent's reputation. What we'll never know is how good Davidson was at the very highest level. That decade featured three FIFA World Cup campaigns (for the 1982, 1986 and 1990 finals) but sadly those brave campaigns – including one against Sir Alex Ferguson's Scotland in 1985 – all ended in Australian exits.

However there is little doubt that if given the chance on the world stage, Davidson was one Australian who would have held his own against most opponents.

In 1988 we were given a glimpse at how good Davidson, and the improving Qantas Socceroos, could be with a breakout campaign at that year's Seoul Olympics.

In those days the full national team was eligible to take part and Australia stunned the world with some eye-catching performances to reach the quarter-finals. They dispatched superstar Dragan Stojkovic's Yugoslavia 1-0 and also won by the same score-line over the talented Nigerians to make the quarter-finals. Although the USSR defeated the green and gold in the final eight, the team had made a statement in Seoul. In fact, it was a boom 12 months for the green and gold. Earlier in the year, Davidson was in the national team for perhaps the greatest-ever friendly victory in our history: the 4-1 thrashing of then-world champions Argentina (albeit minus Maradona) in Sydney during the Gold Cup tournament.

"In my time in the Socceroos – particularly at that Gold Cup in 1988 – he was fantastic," adds Ollerenshaw.

"He played centre midfield," recalls Ollerenshaw of the famous Argentina game which Australia won 4-1.

"His ability and composure on the ball [was great] and you have to remember at that stage Australia was just coming through and we didn't have much respect on the international stage.

"But he was one of the few to have played overseas at Nottingham Forest under "Cloughie". Whenever the ball came into Davo in central midfield, 99 per cent of the time he kept the ball. And when it was the right time to play a killer ball, he'd do it. Technically he was very good and had a real will to win."

Intensity and focus: this shot encapsulates Alan Davidson.

"Most people will tell you that Alan Davidson was the best Socceroo we ever had."

"For me he is the most intense player and person I've ever met. He had this tunnel vision to be the very best he could be. He's not one for going out having a beer with the boys. He always said there is only one thing that matters, and that's being the best."

Before the big move to Forest, Davidson made his name with his local club Altona before transferring to South Melbourne in 1978. Over the next six years and 140 appearances at the Middle Park club, he became part of a golden era and cemented his reputation as a rare local talent.

Following that spell at Forest, Davidson returned home to recuperate from injury. But it wasn't long before Melbourne Knights signed him, where he enjoyed a consistent and successful spell with over 130 appearances during six successful seasons.

Davidson wasn't finished there, though. He was also a pioneer in AFC circles well before the recent explosion of "Asia-Roos".

He inked a deal with Pahang in Malaysia's booming M-League in 1995, where he picked up a whole new generation of fans who loved not only his style on the pitch but his respect and demeanour off the park.

In Malaysia, Davidson was reborn and won it all with the club. He also won himself and Australia massive respect.

"He understood the culture and he knew you had to respect the local culture," says Ollerenshaw, who now lives in Malaysia and runs a youth development tournament called the Borneo Cup.

"He adapted to their culture and when they saw he did that, they respected that."

Incredibly Davidson rejoined South Melbourne for a third time before finishing his NSL career at Collingwood Warriors and finally, as a 38-year-old, at Melbourne Knights.

That was back in 1997.

Davidson's club career had wound down and by that stage he had a son, who is now, at age 20, making his own mark on professional football around the globe.

Davidson Jr. learnt his trade in the Japanese youth system (the Davidson family heritage is Japanese) before returning home to Victoria, where he was soon snapped up by Hume City in the VPL. Jason was voted VPL U-21 Player of the Year in 2009 and was part of the Australian national youth team camps before earning a dream move to Portuguese club Pacos de Fereira.

There, he debuted against none other than Porto. It gave the youngster a taste of top level football but some untimely injuries have stymied his progress. He has since inked a deal with Dutch club Heracles Almelo.

It will be intriguing to see how he keeps the Davidson name going for a new generation of Aussie fans.

As for Jason's father, who now runs junior coaching academies, his ethos is simple and clear for all players to understand.

"The two most important things are confidence and self-esteem. You need to manage the mind first," he says.

"I believe you have to believe. You have to believe in yourself. And be willing to put in the hard work. Hard work is everything."

Alan Edward Davidson is a true legend of Victorian and Australian football. We salute you as one of the greats of our game. ◆

Career Stats

Qantas Socceroos:
1980 - 1991 - 76 caps, two goals
Clubs:
South Melb, Notts Forest, Melbourne Knights, Pahang, Collingwood Warriors

THE WIZARD OF OG

Sasa Ognenovski's career reads like a fairytale. Progressing from the Victorian Premier League to Asian Footballer of the Year in just five years, we look at the rise of the Qantas Socceroos defender

Kathy Stone

It's only fitting that a Qantas Socceroo dubbed 'The Ogre' should be the central figure in one of the great fairytales of modern Australian football.

He may be a captain, capped and in demand now across the region but you don't have to remind Sasa Ognenovski there was no guaranteed happy ending.

Rebuffed repeatedly for national team duty by former national coach Pim Verbeek, the burly 1.95m centre-back was a 31-year-old seasoned pro by the time he first tasted green and gold action.

2010 turned out to be Ognenovski's 'happy ever after' year: captaining his Korean side Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma to glory in the finals of the AFC Champions League, he also took out Man of the Match honours and won the tournament's Most Valuable Player.

And he topped it off by hoisting the 2010 AFC Footballer of the Year award. Not only had his ship come in, but apparently a whole flotilla had docked. In the same year he scored in the FIFA Club World Cup to help set up a semi-final showdown between Seongnam and eventual winners, European giants Inter Milan.

At a point in his career when many players are starting to contemplate life after football, the big man is just hitting his straps.

It's easy to forget that only five years earlier he was toiling away in the Victorian Premier League for the Fawkner-Whittlesea Blues.

As blueprints for success go, the Melbourne-born defender's professional trajectory has been unorthodox to say the least.

In fact the word 'trajectory' hardly comes close to describing the turbo-charged propulsion behind his late career charge.

In 2006 Ognenovski arrived on the ›

The goal-scoring defender does it again on the big stage in the AFC.

Hyundai A League scene with the then named Queensland Roar before transferring to Adelaide United in 2008 where he was a hugely influential cog in the Reds' impressive AFC Champions League campaign, which ended with a runners up medal to Japan's classy Gamba Osaka.

Former Qantas Socceroo Ante Milicic believes that the loss of Ognenovski to Adelaide United cost Roar the title in 2008-09 and helped the Reds to one of their most successful domestic seasons, falling just short of Melbourne Victory.

"If Adelaide didn't sign Sasa, they wouldn't have been the team they were," Milicic told Australian FourFourTwo.

The plaudits kept flowing and in the same year the Reds' synchronised was voted second in Macedonia's Footballer of the Year award after striker Goran Pandev of Inter Milan.

A season later it was Adelaide's turn to count the cost when the defender called time on his Hyundai A League career for a shot at glory in the K-League.

Despite the accolades, Qantas Socceroos selection continued to elude him. Discounted by Verbeek, supposedly because of his age and lack of big stage experience, Ognenovski came within a whisker of taking to the field for the Republic of Macedonia and, but for a last minute hiccup with his eligibility, might be on the teamsheet for the Red Lions today.

It was never his first choice, however, and he admits it was a difficult period. "It was as if no one knew of me," he says. "It got me frustrated with the set-up. I felt like my form had warranted a call-up, but I was repeatedly overlooked."

There was no time to waste on disappointment. Exasperation was another matter. Ognenovski eats frustration for breakfast – it's the only thing that's ever been handed to him on a plate.

It took the arrival of Holger Osieck as Qantas Socceroos boss to breathe life into the dwindling hopes of an international career. The German gave Asia's star player his first cap in a friendly against Egypt in Cairo at the end of 2010 – never has the oxymoron veteran-newcomer seemed so apt – and the Ogre repaid Osieck's faith with strong performances in the Socceroos' tilt for the 2011 AFC Asian Cup crown.

For Ognenovski timing is everything. By his own calculation he has at least "two or three solid years" left in a body which, for the most part, has stood up remarkably well.

"My dream, although I doubt it could come true, is to go to the Bundesliga and then go to the World Cup," he tells Australian FourFourTwo.

"Realistically me playing in Germany is not an obtainable goal as us [Australia] going to the World Cup finals [in 2014], but if I'm still playing. .

"I back up game after game in Korea and I never miss training. I've got a couple of years in me at the very least, and I can only improve."

With a year still remaining on his contract in Korea, he continues to attract interest from abroad. Only last year he rejected an offer from UAE Pro-League club Al Wahda and, more recently revealed, a move to England was thwarted due to red tape.

Still, never say never. Late bloomer he may be, but Ognenovski has a glass-half full perspective on his somewhat tardy entry into the footballing spotlight. "I got going at the top level so late that I have still got some improvement in me," he admits.

With the last few years of his career reading like a fairytale, there could be a couple more chapters to be written yet.

Career stats

Born: April 3, 1979
Place of Birth: Melbourne, Australia
Height: 195m
Position: Centre back
Current Club: Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma in the K-League 2009 to present
Nicknames: 'Scary Sasa', 'Ogre', 'Ogg Monster'
Previous Clubs
Preston Lions - 1997-2000
Melbourne Knights - 2000-02
Panachaiki - 2002-03
Preston Lions - 2003-04
Fawkner-Whittlesea Blues - 2005
Queensland Roar - 2006-08
Adelaide United - 2008-09
International Career
Australia - 12 caps, one goal

SHOOT SCORE

Test your friends or quietly exercise your grey matter. No prizes, just a bit of fun!

1. Which opponent did the Qantas Socceroos last face in Melbourne?
2. Name the month and year of that game?
3. Name Melbourne-born Qantas SoccerooSasa Ognenovski's first Hyundai A-League club?
4. Where in Victoria is the birthplace of Qantas Socceroo Matt Spiranovic?
5. How many times was Kevin Muscat capped for the Qantas Socceroos?
6. True or false: Paul Agostino scored the Qantas Socceroos penalty against Uruguay in the 2001 FIFA World Cup qualifier first leg at the MCG.
7. True or false: Tonight is the first time the Qantas Socceroos have played at AAMI Park?
8. Which Qantas Socceroo has a sister who plays in the Westfield W-League?
9. True or false: The Qantas Socceroos played against Saudi Arabia in the 1997 FIFA Confederations Cup?
10. How many times did Melbourne-based defender Steve Horvat (above) appear for the Qantas Socceroos?
11. Which country will host the AFC Asian Cup 2015?
12. Name the two countries that reached the final of the AFC Asian Cup 2007?
13. Mark Viduka once played for Sunderland. True or false?
14. Against which country did the Qantas Socceroos open their 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers?
15. Who did the Qantas Socceroos face in their opening game of the AFC Asian Cup 2011?

ANSWERS: 1 Serbia 2 June 2011 3 Queensland Roar 4 Geelong 5 31 6 False (Agostino was found in the box but Mustafa Vorogovac was penalty) 7 True 8 Matt Spiranovic 9 True 10 32 11 Australia 12 Iraq and Saudi Arabia 13 False 14 Thailand 15 India

Australian Government

PM's Olympic & Paralympic Challenges

JOIN IN THE SPIRIT OF THE LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, invites all Australian primary school-aged children to participate in the Prime Minister's Olympic and Paralympic Challenges.

The Prime Minister's Olympic Challenge and the Prime Minister's Paralympic Challenge are two individual sporting challenges aimed at encouraging primary school-aged children to get active, have fun and earn rewards.

The Challenges will run across Australia from 28 May 2012, and will conclude at the close of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Express your interest or find out more about the Prime Minister's Olympic and Paralympic Challenges by visiting **www.olympicchallenge.gov.au** or **www.paralympicchallenge.gov.au**

SANTO CILAURO

Santo Cilauro, of 'Santo, Sam and Ed's Sports Fever' fame, reveals his passion for the Qantas Socceroos to Aidan Ormond

You obviously love the Qantas Socceroos...
I grew up going to the football. In fact, when I first started watching the Socceroos they were just known as Australia. People talk about the heartbreak of Iran but I've been through the heartbreak of Argentina, Israel, Scotland. So when we qualified for the last World Cup with a 0-0 draw it was one of those great moments for me - we'd finally qualified for a World Cup in an anti-climactic way!

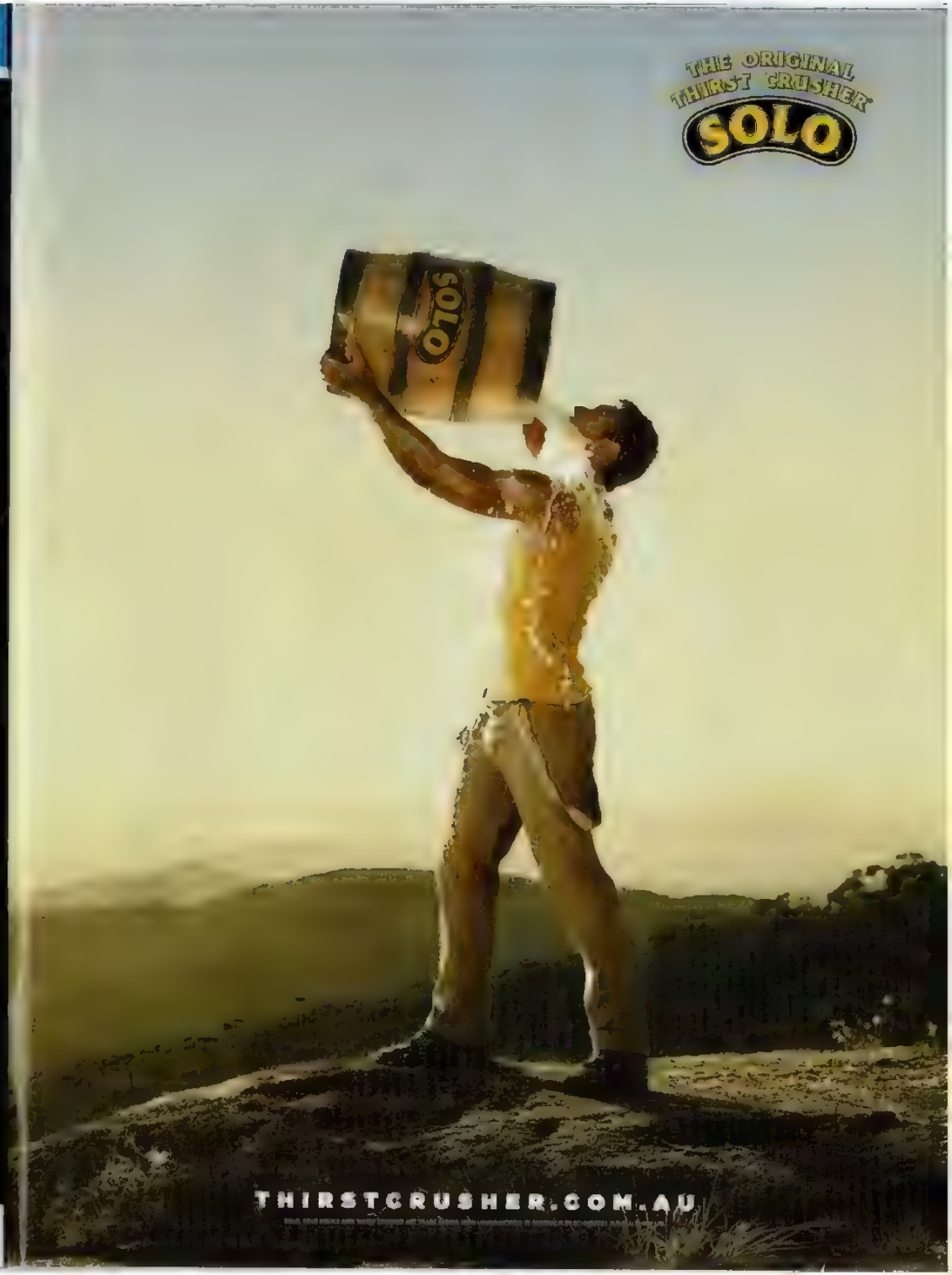
First Qantas Socceroos game?
In the 1970s they'd have triangular series against touring club sides. I think maybe Glasgow Rangers or Dinamo Zagreb.

Is there one special memory of a match?
I had a totally out of body experience when I saw Italy play Australia at the 2006 World Cup in Germany. It was the game I'd been dreaming for my entire life. Even though the result was not what I wanted it was a dream come true. I never thought I'd see in my lifetime Italy play Australia at a World Cup in Europe. It was very, very special.

Current Qantas Socceroos favourite?
I love watching Tommy Oar. And I'm unashamed about this, I love watching Mark Schwarzer. People often talk about John Aloisi in the Uruguay penalty shootout but Schwarzer's keeping was what made it for me.

Best memory of meeting one of the Roos?
About an hour after the Croatia game where we'd qualified for the last 16, Mark Viduka gave me a hug. I was in tears and said, 'You've know idea what's happening back in Australia, everybody loves you'. And he said, 'Mate, do you have a DVD of The Late Show? I want to take it back to camp'. He'd just qualified as captain of the Socceroos and all he wanted was a tape of one of our earlier comedy shows. He's a great man and I do love him.

**'Santo, Sam and Ed's Sports Fever' is on the 7 Network, Monday nights at 10.30pm.*



FIVE MINUTES WITH... MATTHEW SPIRANOVIC

The Qantas Socceroo star tells Aidan Ormond about Tokyo fashions and his Christmas in Geelong

You play for Urawa Red Diamonds, so tell us about living in Tokyo, Spira?
I think the culture change opens you up to a whole new world. Living in Germany for four years before here was a big change from Australia but now living in Tokyo, again it's totally different with the culture, food, people and the language. I live in Saitama and there is Urawa, which is a little place with restaurants and shopping places.

How do you go on the Tokyo subway?
I do probably stand out here a little more than other places. If we have a day off during the week Tokyo is only about 25km away. And there's plenty to do there.

Such as?
Just walking through the streets there's some nice shopping areas and all the big brands are there. I just enjoy having a coffee, lunch and people watching. It's pretty special.

Tokyo fashions, any thoughts?
[Laughs] There are no rules. You can be pretty crazy.

Have you figured out Japanese TV?
The first few months I was stuck in a hotel with only Japanese TV, but now the club has organised some satellite TV for me.

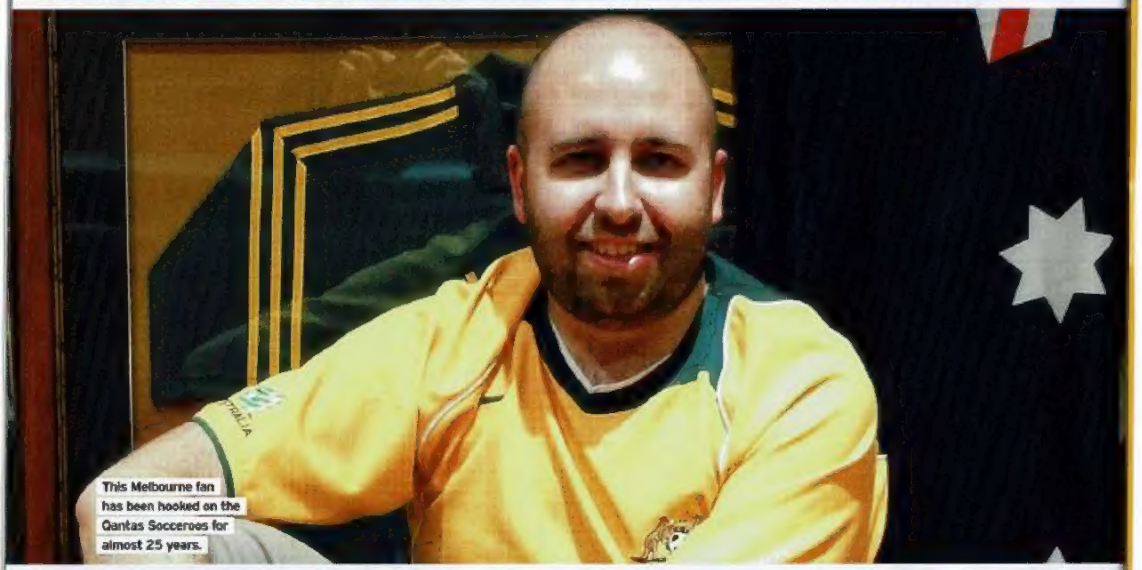
What do you enjoy most when home?
Obviously catching up with family and friends in Victoria. The last break we had I was able to spend a month over summer in Oz. That was nice as it's winter in Japan. I went to the beach which was great. And Mum's cooking is a big highlight. Australia is the best place in the world. We spend long periods of time away so when we can catch up with friends and everyone, you can't compare it.

How was your Christmas?
I actually arrived on Christmas Day in Australia and surprised the family for Christmas lunch. I couldn't find a bus so I took a taxi from Tullamarine to Geelong - they were pretty happy to see me.

And we must ask you about your sister Laura Spiranovic, the Melbourne Victory Westfield W-League striker and Victorian WPL Player of the Year and Golden Boot...
She's pretty modest about her achievements, to be fair. She's worked really hard in the last few years especially with her Uni commitments. She travels from Geelong to Ballarat then to training in Melbourne. She's done really well.

So, does that make you now a Victory fan?
Err... to be honest. I like to follow the A-League but I can't really say I've got a team, to be fair.

Arigato, Spira San!
Arigato, no worries!



This Melbourne fan has been hooked on the Qantas Socceroos for almost 25 years.

TONY PERSOGLIA

TEAM AND JOB...

Hyundai A-League club: Melbourne Victory
Occupation: Sports Management Software

What got you hooked on the Qantas Socceroos?
I was 13 and absolutely hated football - I followed the VFL. One night I caught a glimpse of a replay of Australia beating Argentina 4-1 in the [1988] Bicentennial Gold Cup. I can still remember Martin Tyler's call of Charlie Yankos when he scored that free-kick. The moment struck a chord with me - even I knew that beating the world champions was a big deal. I've been hooked ever since.

Can you remember the first Qantas Socceroos game that you attended?
I followed the Socceroos avidly from that point onward, from Olympic campaigns in Seoul and Barcelona to the failed World Cup campaign against Argentina in 1993. However, I didn't go to my first match until 1997 - the 2-2 draw against Iran at the MCG was a heartbreaking way to lose my Socceroo virginity.

Favourite national team player and why?
Brett Emerton. Always puts his hand up and always gives 100 per cent. He is the model Australian player, both technically and from a career perspective. Every youngster can look up to him and learn a great deal. It's been great to see him return to the A-League - even if it is with Sydney FC!

Describe your favourite Qantas Socceroos match and why?
I can't go past Uruguay in 2005. Everything about that night was destined. It is one of the few times that I've felt that the entire Australian public was behind the Socceroos. One of the greatest days in my life; let alone football!

Finish the following sentence: Qantas Socceroos Holger Osieck is...
...what Australia needs at this point in time. An experienced campaigner, who values our domestic competition and employs a style of football that we, as Australians, enjoy playing and watching.

Are you confident about Brazil 2014?
Reasonably confident. Although you can't be too complacent in Asia, as evidenced by the result against Thailand, where we were tremendously lucky. The final group stage can largely depend on the draw. But in all honesty, after our Asian Cup performance, we shouldn't fear any nation on the road to Rio.

Speaking of the Road to Rio, which players do you think will be vital?
Brett Holman has become our talisman and, as he proved against Saudi Arabia, playing in behind or as a second striker is where he is most valuable. His versatility is only equaled by Emerton. Matt McKay is also going to be key with his versatility as he's equally adept on the left wing or in the centre of the park. Robbie Kruse could provide an X-factor - but so much can happen between now and then.

Best thing about supporting Australia?
The camaraderie with your fellow supporters, particularly on the road, where the shared experience is worth every cent invested.

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MY PERFECT ROOS

Former Qantas Socceroos, Melbourne Heart and EPL midfielder Josip Skoko selects his perfect XI from ten years and 52 appearances in the green and gold.

GK
MARK BOSNICH
At his best he was one of the best keepers I've ever worked with. Anywhere.

RB
KEVIN MUSCAT
A cornerstone. He was tough - especially in hostile games away he'd keep the boys going.

CB
CRAIG MOORE
His name is the first who springs to mind in central defence. Great respect for him.

CB
TONY POPOVIC
He was an ultimate leader; calm on the ball and good in the air. At his peak a huge asset to us.

LB
TONY VIDMAR
With Harry such an attacking option you'd have to go for Vidmar on the left. Top defender.

RM
BRETT EMERTON
Emmo gets the nod because of his great engines, his ability to get up and down and his goals.

CM
NED ZELIC
I didn't play that many times alongside him, but he was that good he just edges out Timmy.

CM
MARK BRESCIANO
An attacking midfielder who just has to be in this team. So much quality, I just can't leave him out.

LM
HARRY KEWELL
At his peak he was unbelievable and an easy choice on the left side of midfield.

CF
JOHN ALOISI
He edges out guys like Agostino; just a great striker and would work well with 'Dukes'.

CF
MARK VIDUKA
What a player. I'd played with him coming through into the national team. Just absolute quality.

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